

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 IO-13
OMB-01 TRSE-00 /079 W
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R 011702Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1115
SECDEF
INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USCINCEUR
USNMR SHAPE
CINCLANT
USDOCOSOUTH
USLOSACLANT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03478

DEFENSE FOR ASD/ISA AND CJCS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, NATO, UK
SUBJECT: UK PRESS REACTION TO DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

REF: LONDON 3377

SUMMARY: ALL QUALITY PAPERS COMMENT ON PUBLICATION
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YESTERDAY OF THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER. EMPHASIS IS ON
THE "DECREASES" AND CONSEQUENCES FOR UK ARMED
FORCES AND EQUIPMENT MODERNIZATION PROGRAMS. THE TENOR
OF COMMENTARY, IN GENERAL, IS RESIGNEDLY CRITICAL BUT
WITH AN AIR OF THE INEVITABILITY OF THE NECESSITY FOR
CUTS. END SUMMARY.

1. ONLY TWO QUALITY PAPERS ELEVATE THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER TO EDITORIAL PAGE COMMENT: THE FINANCIAL TIMES (FT) UNDER THE HEADING "DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE" AND THE DAILY TELEGRAPH UNDER THE HEADING "THE DEFENSE DECEPTION." THE MAIN THRUST OF THE FT'S EDITORIAL IS CLEARLY PUT IN TWO PARAGRAPHS FROM WHICH WE QUOTE: THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER "...GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF THE MILITARY CAPABILITY OF THE WARSAW PACT IN TERMS SO CHILLING AS TO MAKE ONE WONDER HOW THE GOVERNMENT COULD EVER HAVE CONTEMPLATED THE CUTS IN THE FIRST PLACE. . . THE WHITE PAPER OFFERS LITTLE THAT IS NEW IN THE WAY OF JUSTIFICATION (FOR CUTS)...IT HAS MADE ITS CUTS UNILATERALLY WITH CONSULTATIONS WITH ITS ALLIES COMING ONLY AFTER THE BASIC DECISION TO REDUCE EXPENDITURE HAS BEEN TAKEN...IT IS A MATTER OF ASTONISHMENT THAT A GOVERNMENT WHICH CAN SEE PART OF THE SITUATION SO CLEARLY CAN REACT SO BLINDLY. IF NOTHING ELSE, THE L977 WHITE PAPER SHOULD SUCCEED IN CONDEMNING THE GOVERNMENT BY ITS OWN WORDS."

2. THE DAILY TELEGRAPH NOT SURPRISINGLY CASTIGATES THE GOVERNMENT FOR PERFORMING "...THE INCREASINGLY FREQUENT ROUTINE MIRACLE OF CUTTING DEFENSE EXPENDITURE.1*289"565 347&7)6 -*3:58,& *49,5-LINE CAPABILITY. 'SLIMMING THE TAIL WITHOUT BLUNTING THE TEETH' IS MR. MULLEY'S TYPICAL THREADBARE METAPHOR...THE IMPREYICUN IS ONCE AGAIN DELIBERATELY GIVEN THAT 'THE TAIL' IS SOME KIND OF LARGELY SUPERFLUOUS EXCRESCENCE WHICH CAN BE CUT AND 'SLIMMED' INDEFINITELY WITHOUT THE 'TEETH' NOTICING IT. CONFIDENTIAL

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YET IN HARD LIFE-OR-DEATH, WIN-OR-LOSE-THE-BATTLE FACT, THE TAIL IN THIS CONTEXT MEANS EVERYTHING THAT THE FIGHTING MEN NEED..."

3. ADDRESSING THE WHITE PAPER'S TREATMENT OF THE SOVIET THREAT, THE TELEGRAPH EDITORIAL COMMENTS: "PRESUMABLY THE SHOCK EFFECT IS CONSIDERED NECESSARY TO WIN PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT THAT IS STILL BEING SPENT ON DEFENSE, AND TO REFUTE ARGUMENTS FROM THE LEFT THAT DEFENSE EXPENDITURE IS UNNECESSARY...ONE DEVELOPMENT OF ENORMOUS IMPORTANCE TO WHICH ATTENTION IS NOT PROPERLY DRAWN IS THAT THE WARSAW PACT HAS NOW A SUFFICIENT SUPERIORITY OF READY FORCES TO LAUNCH AN UNSTOPPABLE ATTACK..."

4. THE GUARDIAN IN TWO ARTICLES TITLED "HOW TO AXE ARMS WITHOUT HARMING NATO" AND "CUTTING THE COST OF DEFENSE" BY DAVID FAIRHALL, ITS DEFENSE CORRESPONDENT, ADDRESSES THE WHITE PAPER AT LENGTH IN A BASICALLY

STRAIGHT-FORWARD REPORTORIAL MANNER.

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R 011702Z MAR 77
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WHILE CUTS IN DEFENSE EQUIPMENT PROGRAMS ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN A THIRD OF THE 77-78 "SAVINGS," FAIRHALL FEELS THAT "A LOT OF PEOPLE DO SEEM TO HAVE LOST SIGHT OF THE FACT THAT THE DEFENSE BUDGET HAS EMERGED FROM A SMOKE-SCREEN OF SUCCESSIVE REVIEWS IN A REMARKABLY STABLE CONDITION."

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5. COMMENT: WHILE PROMINENCE IS GIVEN IN TODAY'S PRESS TO THE DEFENSE CUTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK'S DEFENSE EFFORT, THE TREATMENT BY AND LARGE IS SUBDUED -- GIVEN THE ALMOST UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE HERE THAT BRITAIN'S AILING ECONOMY PROBABLY AT BEST COULD CARRY ONLY A MARGINAL INCREASE IN DEFENSE SPENDING OVER THE CURRENT RATE. NATURALLY, THE OPPOSITION TAUNTS THE GOVERNMENT FOR INFLECTING TOO HEAVY CUTS AND THE LEFT-WING OF THE LABOR PARTY CONTIVES TO ASSERT THAT THE CUTS ARE ASLEIGHT-OF-HAND BEHIND WHICH THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO HIDE ITS FAILURE TO CARRY OUT THE LABOR PARTY'S MANIFESTO "TO MAKE REAL CUTS" IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURES. MULLEY AND HIS SENIOR HRD COLLEAGUES HOWEVER GIVE EVERY INDICATION THAT, IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THEY ACCEPT MOD ALMOST CERTAINLY COULD NOT HAVE COME OUT OF THE "PUBLIC EXPENDITURE CUT DEBATE" NOTICEABLY BETTER THAN IT DID AND THEY TAKE SATISFACTION THAT IT DID NOT SUFFER WORSE -- SINCE AT HOME EMAGES OF THE CABINET BATTLE ON THE IMF LOAN CONDITIONS IT APPEARED THAT THAT WOULD BE THE CASE. MULLEY HAS MADE THE POINT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS RECENTLY THAT THE GOVERNMENT LOOKS FOR REAL INCREASES IN DEFENSE SPENDING IF THE RATE OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY IMPROVES SUBSTANTIALLY. ALMOST ALL SENIOR MOD OFFICIALS ARE AGREED THAT A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE IMMEDIATE NOTIONAL INCREASES IN DEFENSE SPENDING BUT THAT IN CURRENT ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES SUCH MODEST INCREASES WOULD AT BEST ONLY HAVE A MARGINAL IMPACT "ON THE FRINGES" OF THE PROBLEM.

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